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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 45th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 9 April 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DESPOUY (Argentina)

later: Ms. AL-HAJJAJI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

CONTENTS

INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE:

(a) VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (continued)

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTIONS OF:

(e) RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE:

(a) VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

(agenda item 12) (continued) (E/CN.4/2001/70-E/CN.6/2001/3, E/CN.4/2001/71, 72, 73 and Add.1 and 2, E/CN.4/2001/126-E/CN.6/2001/6; E/CN.4/2001/NGO/24, 25, 32, 37, 46, 56, 72, 77, 95, 113, 127, 151 and 169; E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/17, 18 and 21)

1. Mr. MOLANDER (Observer for Sweden), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, said that, while there had been some improvements in the human rights of women in some countries, the Union was deeply concerned that many women were not part of that development. Governments must implement effective legislation and policies to ensure that women were given the opportunity to enjoy their human rights.

2. Women continued to be victims of violence, including domestic violence. Governments must prevent such acts and punish the perpetrators.. They must also address the stereotypes that surrounded that phenomenon. At the international level, the issue of violence against women in armed conflict had been addressed in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. All States should accede thereto.

3. Harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation and so-called honour killings, must be urgently addressed. Social, cultural or religious factors could not be invoked as a justification for human rights violations. The Union supported the mandate and work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

4. The Union welcomed the adoption of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and urged Governments to sign and ratify those instruments. To combat such trafficking, Governments must also work together to address poverty and social exclusion and to prevent information technologies from being misused.

5. Promotion of gender equality was an effective way of combating poverty. In that regard, the Union wished to emphasize the right of women to equality with men before the law, including in respect of ownership of land and the right to inheritance. Governments should adopt policies guaranteeing equal access to education and should seek to ensure universal access to primary health care, including sexual and reproductive health, and to reduce the risk of young people, especially girls, becoming infected with HIV/AIDS.

6. The Union was seriously concerned about the number of reservations made to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, some of which were incompatible with the Convention. He urged the States party to the Convention to

withdraw such reservations and to bring their national legislation into conformity with their obligations. They should also give serious consideration to ratifying the Optional Protocol thereto.

7. The principle of equality between men and women was a fundamental value of the Union. The recently adopted Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union was devoted, inter alia, to the application of the principles of equality between the sexes in all areas. Two recently adopted directives dealing with discrimination in various areas also integrated a gender perspective.

8. Lastly, he urged States to sign and ratify the international human rights instruments and to cooperate with the United Nations human rights mechanisms so that all individuals, including women and girls, could enjoy the rights enshrined in those instruments.

9. Mr. BINDIG (Germany) said that the issue of the traffic in women and girls was of particular importance to his delegation since Germany was both a country of destination and a transit country in the trafficking of human beings. Law-enforcement agencies of all the countries concerned must cooperate to fight that hideous phenomenon. At the national level, Germany had adopted a victim-oriented approach to the issue. Intensive counselling of victims had become standard procedure and consideration was being given to improving witness protection programmes so as to encourage victims to testify against the traffickers. Germany was also helping to deal with the root causes in the countries of origin through cooperation programmes aimed at improving education and investment conditions, building infrastructure and creating jobs.

10. With regard to violence against women, his delegation believed that the practice of female genital mutilation should be prohibited by law in all societies. Germany was doing its part to combat violence against women. It had adopted a national action plan on the subject and was pursuing active advocacy of women's rights internationally. It welcomed the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

11. Mr. AL -HUSSAMI (Syria) said that all legislation in his country promoted the role of the family, which was the foundation of society. The Constitution guaranteed the right of women to participate on an equal footing with men in the economic, social and cultural life of the country. Two ministers were women; women also played an important role in the judiciary, in Parliament and in party leadership.

12. The Federation of Syrian Women had done much to eliminate the obstacles preventing women from participating fully in society; it had promoted social, cultural and training activities, particularly as regards literacy training, and was active in combating diseases. It had recently organized, with the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Ministry of Health, a seminar on combating discrimination. Personal status legislation had been amended with the result that women could take responsibility for children, could divorce and could stand for election. The Syrian public supported the promotion of women's rights in all areas.

13. Mr. ALCAIDE (Observer for El Salvador), speaking also on behalf of Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, said that those countries attached particular importance to women's rights and that there were many women in important positions both in Government and in other areas. They had adopted legislation to guarantee equality among men and women in the region and had included a cross-cutting gender perspective in all policies and programmes implemented by national and subregional bodies. Particular attention was paid to education, training, the elimination of domestic violence and health.

14. In Costa Rica and Panama, nearly all pregnant women received pre-natal care and nearly all births were attended by trained personnel. Other countries had also made significant strides in that regard. More needed to be done to strengthen programmes to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Regarding the treatment for the latter he expressed concern at the high cost of medication, which made it inaccessible for the underprivileged, and expressed the hope that the international community would come up with a solution that would be geographically inclusive.

15. He also expressed concern at the phenomenon of sexual tourism which could give rise to modern forms of slavery, and stressed the commitment of the countries he was representing to working with the international community to eradicate that phenomenon.

16. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement in the status of women in the Secretariat (A/55/399), he expressed concern at the slow increase in the representation of women at the senior policy-making levels (D-1 level and above), at the decrease in the percentage of women at the P-4 level and at the absence of any women appointed as special representatives and special envoys.

17. Lastly, he drew attention to the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, which had developed the Gender Awareness Information and Networking System, an interactive, virtual workshop on gender in which investigators, trainers, information and communications technology experts and focal points could participate at the national and regional levels. He called on traditional and potential donors for funding for the Institute, noting that unless resources were forthcoming, it would be forced to close by the end of the year.

18. Mr. NÆSS (Norway) said that the time had come to concentrate on the implementation of human rights instruments. His delegation hoped that the Optional Protocol would prove to be an effective instrument in implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It was regrettable that universal ratification of the Convention itself had not yet been achieved and that a large number of Member States had entered reservations that were incompatible with its object and purpose. In the preparations for the forthcoming World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, it would be necessary to take into consideration the way in which gender-based and other forms of discrimination intersected.

19. Emphasis had recently been placed on the fact that gender inequality was linked to poverty: poverty reduction had to begin with the protection and realization of the human rights of children, and investment in children, particularly girls, was the best means of achieving equitable human development. The HIV/AIDS pandemic had both gender implications and gender-related causes; it was therefore of the utmost importance to mainstream human rights as well as a gender perspective in the preparations for the General Assembly special session on HIV/AIDS. The two perspectives should be fully integrated into the processes of other United Nations conferences also. In that regard, the welcome cooperation between the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women should be strengthened.

20. His delegation strongly supported a zero tolerance policy on gender-based violence, and welcomed the recommendations on violence against women in armed conflict made by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. "Honour killings", which the Secretary-General had called "shame killings", should be paid more attention: everything possible must be done to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes were prosecuted and the victims given adequate protection.

21. It was also essential to muster the political will and the necessary international cooperation to combat trafficking in women and girls, and to ensure that the perpetrators of that form of organized crime were prosecuted. His delegation welcomed the relevant Protocol to the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and hoped that the instrument would be widely ratified. The Protocol alone would not, however, ensure the eradication of trafficking in persons.

22. Ms. GERVAIS-VIDRICAIRE (Canada) said that, although there was no room for complacency, much progress had been made in the past year in mainstreaming the gender perspective. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination had adopted a general recommendation on the gender-related dimensions of racial discrimination; the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women had been renewed for a further three-year term; Member States had reaffirmed their commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the Security Council had adopted its landmark resolution 1325 (2000) on "Women and peace and security"; the Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had entered into force; and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia had issued a judgement identifying sexual enslavement as a crime against humanity. Nevertheless, universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had yet to be achieved, and the number of reservations to it remained high.

23. Her Government welcomed the renewed attention the Special Rapporteur had given in her report to violence against women in situations of armed conflict. With regard to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), it urged all parties to apply the recommendations contained therein and to make particular efforts to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, to integrate a gender perspective when negotiating and implementing peace agreements; to urge all parties to armed conflict fully to respect the international law applicable to the human rights and protection of women and girls and to take special measures to

protect them from gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict; and to urge all States to eliminate impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes relating to violence against women and girls.

24. The decision by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia confirming that acts of sexual violence committed during armed conflict might be considered as crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of war showed that, when investigators, prosecutors and judges were trained in gender equality issues, impunity for violence against women could be thwarted. The ruling also demonstrated the concrete outcomes of paying attention to gender issues. There had been an increase in investigations and prosecutions for crimes against women in situations of armed conflict, and that progress should be sustained and built upon in future prosecutions, both national and international.

25. Her delegation was encouraged by the increasing collaboration between the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women and their respective secretariats. The joint work plan of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Division for the Advancement of Women was of critical importance for the continued exchange of information and expertise essential to making the integration of women's human rights and a gender perspective in the United Nations system a reality. No form of discrimination could be effectively addressed without explicit recognition of gender considerations, and her delegation wished to encourage the forthcoming World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance to integrate a gender perspective into all aspects of its work. Governments had a critical role to play: they could include more women in their delegations to the United Nations, propose more women candidates for election or appointment to United Nations posts as well as for election or appointment, for example, as judges in international courts and tribunals.

26. Ms. INAYATULLAH (Pakistan) said that her country's Constitution was one of the few that contained articles calling for affirmative action to ensure the full participation of women in all spheres of life. On the occasion of International Women's Day, 2000, the Chief Executive of Pakistan, General Musharraf had, for the first time ever, delivered a State of the Nation address to the women of Pakistan in which he had stated that the cornerstone of his Government's policy was the elimination of gender bias in development and that progress for women was progress for all. The agenda of women was mainstreamed into the Government's sustainable economic growth package. Women would shortly constitute one third of all elected local government officials; there was a commitment to affirmative action at the provincial assembly and parliamentary levels; village committees would have a one third representation of women; and women were recognized as the beneficiaries of food subsidies.

27. Pakistan was giving active consideration to signing and ratifying the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and expected in the near future to be a signatory to Convention No. 100 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on equal remuneration. A task force was reviewing Pakistan's Muslim personal and family laws in order to revise them with provisions from the Koran and Sunna to strengthen the female right to inheritance, simplify the rights to divorce, improve the marriage contract and review the provisions for the maintenance and custody of children. Jail conditions for women were also being improved.

28. Violence against women, particularly within the home, was of serious concern to her Government, and the National Commission on the Status of Women had been asked to report on the situation and recommend measures to remedy it. Each district in Pakistan was to have a family protection complex, linked with shelter homes and crisis centres for endangered women, the local police station and the judicial system. Pakistan's economic revival package had a strong strategy for the economic empowerment of women through capacity-building, skills training and credit facilities. The gender gap in education was being closed.

29. Turning to violence against women in situations of armed conflict, she said that the impunity of law-enforcement officials and the lack of accountability of perpetrators of rape and other forms of gender-based violence was particularly manifest in occupied territories, such as Kashmir and Palestine, and represented a major challenge to the international community. Her delegation fully endorsed the Special Rapporteur's call for all States to allow non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media free access to areas of armed conflict to report on the situation of women and girls and especially on war crimes committed by government forces.

30. The barbaric practice of so-called "honour killings" had been wrongfully associated with Islamic societies. She wished to stress that there was no compatibility between such criminal acts and Islamic States or the religion of Islam. Her Government considered all forms of passion killing, including "honour killings", to be murder and was firm in combating the practice through full implementation and enforcement of the law. The administrative and law-enforcement agencies in Pakistan were under strict instructions to permit no manipulation in registering or processing such cases.

31. Ms. DIALLO (Senegal), having welcomed the Secretary-General's efforts to integrate a gender perspective throughout the United Nations system and the resolution adopted in that regard by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-fifth session, said that all forms of violence against women must be combated and all inequalities between men and women corrected so that women could participate fully and effectively on an equal footing with men in all areas of public and private life.

32. Significant progress had been made in many countries, and some, like Senegal, had launched awareness campaigns on violence against women. Discriminatory legislation had been removed from the criminal code and from the law relating to marriage, family relations, succession and the right to property. Senegal was in the process of harmonizing its national legislation with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The country's new Fundamental Law, adopted by referendum on 7 January 2001, enshrined the basic rights of women and children by making explicit reference in its preamble to the respective international Conventions. The new Senegalese Constitution gave women the right to own property. The Senegalese authorities were going to concentrate more on the situation of women, and particularly rural women.

33. Much had been done, but there was an enormous amount still to do, particularly with regard to functional literacy, the education of girls and the host of productive activities performed by rural women. Projects and programmes were being implemented in Senegal to enhance the economic, technical and financial capacities of women through access to credit and micro-credit and to increase their participation in the decision-making process at all levels and in

all areas by putting particular emphasis on combating poverty and its particular impact on women, and on the training and schooling of girls. Senegal was undertaking such initiatives in cooperation with women's NGOs, development partners and civil society.

34. Lastly, it was both necessary and important to integrate a gender perspective into the preparatory process for the forthcoming World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, as well as in the conclusions to be reached by that Conference.

35. Ms. TAHIR-KHELI (United States of America) said that if there was one key to the progress of women it was education and its empowerment of the individual. Wherever women had had educational opportunity they had proved themselves, improving their families, communities and countries in the process. Where they had been denied that opportunity, their families and countries were the poorer, with shortened life spans, endemic poverty and high rates of maternal and infant mortality. Women in her own country were breaking new ground and increasingly assuming leadership positions in all walks of life. In United States schools and colleges, women were doing as well as or better than men according to many of the indicators of educational attainment.

36. The perspective women had brought to United States society had had an important effect on the country's development assistance, which currently funded numerous health, education, micro-credit and civic empowerment programmes for women throughout the world. An issue on which her Government was focusing considerable attention was trafficking, the majority of victims of which were women and girls. It was one of the fastest growing and most nefarious types of international criminal activity, and to address it Congress had passed an act in October 2000 which increased penalties, mandated special training for law-enforcement authorities and created a new non-immigrant classification for victims of the most severe forms of trafficking which provided them with access to many federal benefits and services.

37. Her Government had published a brochure warning potential victims of the risks of trafficking and how they might protect themselves; it had been translated into 24 languages and was distributed through United States consulates and to local NGOs. Her Government was also stepping up its efforts to coordinate information with like-minded Governments about the criminals and syndicates that preyed on human victims, so that they could be identified and prosecuted. It was also working with public and private groups and human rights groups both domestically and internationally.

38. Trafficking was only one of the human rights problems that afflicted women and girls. In many places a girl was simply not valued as highly as a boy, limiting the opportunities for millions of women to reach their full potential. Their lack of control over sexual relationships increased their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, and the greater social stigma they faced once infected made it more difficult to seek adequate care and treatment. Domestic violence, once hidden, was out in the open and could be combated. Women and girls frequently bore the brunt of harmful traditional or customary practices that caused physical and emotional scars: such practices had to end. Her Government applauded the recent finding by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia that enslavement of Muslim women and girls by three Bosnian Serbs for the purposes of repeated rape constituted a crime against humanity.

39. Ms. AL-HAJJAJI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that Islamic scholars found incomparable pleasure in studying the text of the Koran. One of the subjects of most engrossing interest was the question of the rights given to women by the Koran and the position the Muslim woman held in her society. An examination of the relevant texts quickly brought up a number of important issues, such as the relationship of women to inheritance, worship, polygamy and the veil. Exploring the text of the Koran had no bearing on the meaning or implications of the faith. It merely gave one the opportunity to consider the historical dimensions of women's existence within a specific temporal and spatial environment. Above all, she wished to emphasize the primacy of the context over the form of the text.

40. With regard to the particularly controversial issue of inheritance, some scholars maintained that the teachings of the Koran were proof that men and women were not equal in many areas, basing themselves on verse 11 of the chapter entitled "Women". The verse stated "A male shall inherit twice as much as a female". That text had, however, to be seen in terms of the essential vision of the Koran, the moral foundation of which was that there was full equality among men, regardless of race, religion, language, colour or social or economic origin.

41. Other issues to be taken into account were the social and political context and the impact that various other cultures which acknowledged women's rights had had on Muslim thinking after the Islamic conquest. The social context in which the scholars themselves lived was also relevant. Inevitably, such considerations had repercussions for the interpretation of a given text. The verse in question might be understood to mean that a woman should inherit at least half an inheritance.

42. Moreover, scholars - whether wittingly or not - sometimes overlooked the fact that there was nothing to prevent a man from transferring his fortune to his daughters during his lifetime and depriving his sons, or sharing it equally between them. That interpretation was consistent with other chapters of the Koran. It was important to clarify the issue, since such statements were often used as grounds to attack the Koran in its entirety.

43. Ms. de ARMAS GARCÍA (Cuba) said that two thirds of the 820 million people who suffered from hunger, mostly in the third world, were women. Of all maternal deaths, 99.5 per cent occurred in the third world. Of the 34.3 million people infected with HIV/AIDS, 15.5 million were women, two thirds of them in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, 40 per cent of pregnant women were HIV-positive and some 2,500 women died every day of AIDS. In other words, for countless millions of women the priority was not "empowerment" or "gender mainstreaming", important as such goals were, but sheer survival.

44. It was doubtful whether, the Commission was adopting the right approach in advancing women's rights. The report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.4/2001/71) and the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women (E/CN.4/2001/73 and Add.1 and 2) demonstrated the same double standards as obtained in other areas. The developing countries were singled out, with the racist implication that only in such countries were women's human rights violated. Moreover, the reports reflected an obsession with incorporating agenda item 9 into all the Commission's work. That led to the chronic problem of overlapping mandates, which militated

against attempts to rationalize the work of the United Nations, as well as reinforcing the tendency towards confrontation rather than cooperation in solving the urgent problems affecting women.

45. There was thus no opportunity of discussing the problems affecting women in the rich countries. In the United States, women's wages still amounted to only 73 per cent of the wages received by men for the same work. Women also constituted 70 per cent of part-time employees, who received only marginal social benefits, if any. Women constituted 85 per cent of the workers with more than one job and immigrant women received 22 per cent less than the average female citizen. There was no analysis of the fact that 60 per cent of women prisoners in the United States were African Americans or Hispanics, and, no attention was paid to the rights of African American mothers whose mortality rates in childbirth had reached the astronomic figure of 48 per cent over the past decade.

46. What the countries of the third world required was a new climate of international cooperation arising out of a new economic and social order in which all kinds of discrimination were eliminated, progress and well-being were assured for all and due respect was paid to sovereignty, independence, self-determination and non-intervention in a State's domestic affairs. Those countries would then have the possibility of participating on an equal footing in the decision-making process.

47. The experience of the Cuban revolution demonstrated that different ways of benefiting human beings were possible and that the situation of women could be radically transformed. In Cuba, women constituted 43.6 per cent of the labour force; 32.3 per cent of the persons appointed to economic, social and political posts; 27.62 per cent of members of parliament; 66.6 per cent of technicians and professionals; 60.6 per cent of university students; and 41.7 per cent of scientific researchers. On the other hand, the maternal mortality rate was only 2.2 per 10,000 births, while life expectancy for women at birth was 76.6 years.

48. Cuba was the first country to sign and the second to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It had also signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention shortly after its adoption. The Government had submitted all the required periodic reports. Cuban women's full emancipation had been a result of the democratic system adopted in 1959, in which women had played an outstanding part, and the most flagrant and systematic violation of Cuban women's rights was the economic, financial and commercial blockade applied by successive United States administrations for over 40 years. She belonged to the generation of women who had been born blockaded and whose children had also been born blockaded. It was unacceptable for the Commission to condemn a Government that had put an end to over 50 years of neocolonial domination by the United States.

49. Mrs. RUSTAM (Indonesia) said her delegation was most gratified at the strong momentum that mainstreaming women's rights into all aspects of development and social action had developed. The goal of eradicating gender-based discrimination was achievable. There must, however, be continued improvement within the international bodies charged with attaining equality for all. Women's rights should be integrated into all aspects of United Nations human rights mechanisms. In that connection, the 2001 joint work plan of the OHCHR and the Division for the Advancement of Women was an admirable manifestation of the cooperation between the

two secretariats. Such initiatives would become even more important as preparations for the forthcoming World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance became more advanced.

50. She recalled the agreed conclusions on gender and all forms of discrimination adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2001. A similar integrated and holistic approach should be taken to address racism in all its forms, with the adoption of both legislation and normative measures. Special provisions to address the particular concerns of women and girls, including preventive measures aimed at the elimination of violence against women, should be adopted.

51. The issue of women and armed conflict was increasingly the focus of international attention. While attaching importance thereto, her delegation did not wish to lose sight of the broader concerns. The goals of the international community would not be met unless women played a full role in peace-building, as called for by the Fourth World Conference on Women. There was, moreover, a need to address the root causes of conflicts, namely poverty and underdevelopment.

52. Poverty and ignorance were the root causes of racism, gender discrimination and violence against women. The recent economic crisis had facilitated the exploitation of ethnic differences in some parts of her country. The Government did not, however, accept racial or ethnic discrimination and condemned it wherever it manifested itself.

53. The Government was also deeply concerned about the problem of violence against women. It had adopted a "zero tolerance" policy in that regard. It had signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was committed to its implementation. A National Action Plan had been drafted for 2001-2004 incorporating the "zero tolerance" strategy, creating safety mechanisms and establishing new legislation to punish the perpetrators of such violence. It was to be hoped that greater freedom of the press would complement such action by focusing increased attention on the problem at all levels.

54. The National Commission on Human Rights, the National Committee on Anti-Violence against Women and the National Commission on the Protection of Children worked to highlight the issue of violence against women and strengthen national accountability. Their efforts would be strengthened by additional support from the international community. Complaint procedures were being put in place, together with a witness protection programme. Regrettably, however, there had been an increase in gender violence over the past year, probably as a result of the worsening economic situation.

55. Her Government provided some counselling for abused women and several private organizations also assisted them, with the focus more on reuniting women with their families than on providing protection. There was a small but growing number of women's crisis centres, including a drop-in centre in Jakarta founded by the Government-sponsored National Women's Organization in 1996. Others were administered by NGOs, while several public hospitals in Jakarta, Jogjakarta and Surabaya contained crisis centres for abused women. The police stations in those cities had opened "women's desks" to assist in rape and domestic violence cases.

56. Mr. LI Dongsheng (China) said that Governments, the international community and NGOs all attached importance to the outcome of the recent special session of the General Assembly and were taking positive steps to implement the results. At the same time, the difficulties faced by many countries, particularly the developing countries, must be taken into account. The benefits of globalization had not been equally distributed. The gap between rich and poor was widening; and poverty constituted a major obstacle to the realization of women's rights. The number of women victims of various diseases - especially HIV/AIDS - who were unable to pay high prices for drugs and medical care was on the increase. Moreover, the traditional prejudice and discrimination against women deprived many of them of the opportunity of employment and education.

57. There were a number of priorities that should be set. The first should be poverty eradication. Developing countries should strive to develop their economies. Only thus could the economic foundation be laid for enhancing women's status. Secondly, since disease and poverty formed a vicious circle, Governments should pay special attention to women's health issues and adopt practical measures to that end, especially in developing countries. Thirdly, education should be improved, since it determined the pace and quality of social development, which itself was the key to women's participation in politics and employment. His delegation called on the international community, especially the developed countries, to provide genuine assistance and support for the efforts made by the developing countries in those areas.

58. Women's rights were trampled underfoot by various evil powers, including the Falun Gong cult. Taking advantage of women's sincerity and kindness, Falun Gong exercised control over their minds, gradually depriving them of freedom of expression and causing them to abandon their families and become irrational. Irremediable harm was caused to their health or even their lives. Several hundred women had died of curable diseases because they had refused medical treatment.

59. Even more shockingly, many Falun Gong practitioners had mutilated themselves or committed suicide, believing such action to be a passport to heaven. On 23 January 2001, seven Falun Gong practitioners, including five women, had set fire to themselves in Tiananmen Square. One mother and daughter had already died and another mother and daughter were in a critical condition. The Government had banned the cult in order to protect other innocent women and girls. His delegation called on the whole international community to act to eradicate all evil cults in order to protect women's rights and interests.

60. Mrs. DINH THI MINH HUYEN (Viet Nam), expressing concern at the increase in trafficking of women and girls from developing countries, welcomed the international efforts being made to combat such crimes, especially within the United Nations system.

61. Vietnamese law guaranteed the principle of equality and non-discrimination between men and women. The State attached great importance to the equal enjoyment by women of all human rights. In the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, priority had been given to employment generation and poverty alleviation, and significant achievements had been registered in both areas. In particular, women made up 26 per cent of the national assembly, the highest proportion in Asia.

62. Her Government was actively tackling social evils such as narcotic drug abuse and trafficking in women and girls, and had improved domestic legislation and strengthened punitive measures to that end. National machinery had also been created to combat HIV/AIDS, narcotics and prostitution. Thanks to public information campaigns and other measures, a number of brothels and trafficking networks had been eradicated, the perpetrators prosecuted and the victims offered rehabilitative care and financial support.

63. Her Government also cooperated in related efforts at the regional and international levels. The international community should take further action, in particular by condemning the misuse of the Internet for trafficking purposes. Moreover, Governments should address the root causes of trafficking, namely poverty, unemployment and social discrimination. Those forms of violence against women would be eradicated only when the principle of equal rights and non-discrimination was realized.

64. Ms. GUSYNINA (Russian Federation) said that, in the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (E/CN.4/2001/73 and Add.1), broad generalizations and groundless accusations had been made concerning the actions of the federal forces in the Chechen Republic engaged in anti-terrorist activities. The Special Rapporteur should be advised not to listen to rumours and fabrications, but to witness the situation for herself. Such visits required preparation, but thus far, she had failed to respond to the Government's invitation to visit the area.

65. The special session of the General Assembly, while adding new momentum to the efforts of the international community to combat discrimination against women, had revealed how much remained to be done before full equality was achieved. In many countries, women were still unaware of their rights. The attention accorded to the "dual burden" on women in countries in transition had been particularly welcome. The results of the special session must be translated into concrete programmes at all levels, not least by the specialized agencies of the United Nations systems.

66. Government mechanisms had the primary responsibility for resolving women's issues. In the Russian Federation, the national commission for the advancement of women sought to outlaw discrimination in the workplace, increase the participation of women in decision-making, prevent violence in the family and improve the situation of the most vulnerable groups. Additional measures would soon be taken in respect of trafficking in women and their sexual exploitation abroad, but since trade in "living merchandise" depended on demand, responsibility must also be shared by the countries of destination. The draft national plan of action for women envisaged, inter alia, the signing by the Russian Federation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

67. Her delegation welcomed the recommendation in the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.4/2001/71) concerning the need to clarify further "the obligations of States to prevent and redress violations of women's rights". States should also take steps to improve the situation of women living in poverty and to eliminate prostitution networks. The OHCHR efforts to address trafficking in persons were particularly welcome. The international community must make joint efforts to achieve the goal of genuine gender equality in the twenty-first century.

68. Ms. Al-Hajjaji (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

69. Mr. SOLARI (Argentina) expressed support for all the United Nations activities to improve the status of women, urging States to implement the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.4/2001/71). He also welcomed the report by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women (E/CN.4/2001/73 and Add.1-2). The violence described in that report made it clear that women should be included at all United Nations levels, not least in peacekeeing and civil police units.

70. In his own country, the relevant international instruments had been incorporated into domestic legislation, including the International Convention against All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In addition, the participation of women in politics had recently been reinforced, and a minimum quota of 30 per cent women in parliament established. His Government was committed to protecting the human rights of women, including their sexual and reproductive rights, and was focusing on reducing maternal mortality, preventing teenage pregnancy and protecting motherhood and the health of women and children.

71. Violence against women was being addressed through legislative and practical measures, including public education programmes and media campaigns. Research and counselling facilities had been provided for victims of physical and psychological abuse, and free legal advice was also provided. The Criminal Code had been modernized in 1999 to ensure that sexual violence was viewed as an offence to the dignity of the individual and not as an attack on a woman's purity or honour. The punishment for such crimes had also been increased. His Government was committed to defending the human rights of women, in particular by eradicating gender-related violence and building a society of equal opportunity and justice. It had signed in December 2000 the Protocol to the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime to Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and the ratification process was under way in the Argentine parliament.

72. Mr. WATANABE (Japan) said that, if the twenty-first century was to be peaceful and prosperous, gender equality must be ensured. His Government was determined to implement the results of the recent special session of the General Assembly and had approved a national plan of action to that end, which included long-term measures to expand women's participation in decision-making, to remove existing disparities between male and female workers, and to eliminate all forms of violence against women. In addition, national machinery for achieving and monitoring gender equality had been strengthened, and the implementation of equal opportunity legislation reinforced.

73. Convinced that international cooperation was crucial to furthering the empowerment of women in developing countries, his Government had, over the past five years, taken the initiative in supporting United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) activities aimed at empowering women in developing countries. By focusing at the international level on the issue of "human security", his Government sought to address the feminization of poverty and other problems associated with those aspects of globalization which had proved negative. It was determined to make every effort to promote gender equality in Japan and in the world by working together with the United Nations system and civil society.

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTIONS OF:

(e) RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

(agenda item 11) (continued) (E/CN.4/2001/63)

74. Mr. KHANI JOOYABAD (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his delegation wished to correct a misrepresentation in the report by the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance (E/CN.4/2001/63). The three Baha'is mentioned in paragraphs 77-79 had been convicted of spying, and not on the grounds of their religion. Nor had any death sentences been confirmed. According to the latest information available, one had been released, while the others had received prison sentences of from four to seven years. It was to be hoped, however, that the latter would benefit from official pardons and be released in the near future.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.